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ABSTRACT

The Parole Officer Aide Program of Ohio employs qualified ex-offenders as Parole Officer Aides (POA). The POA is given on-the-job training for six months and assumes the identical tasks as parole officers with the exception of signing parole violation reports. The POA's background and familiarity with local situations gives him the ability to handle multiple problem cases. The State, regular parole officers, and the parolees under POA supervision are the main beneficiaries of the program. The program's success can be attributed to the number of qualified applicants, strict and sensible screening, training, and the support of parole officers. Answers to questions regarding the development of POA programs are presented. (Author/EC)

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An Exemplary Project

ONLY EX-OFFENDERS NEED APPLY

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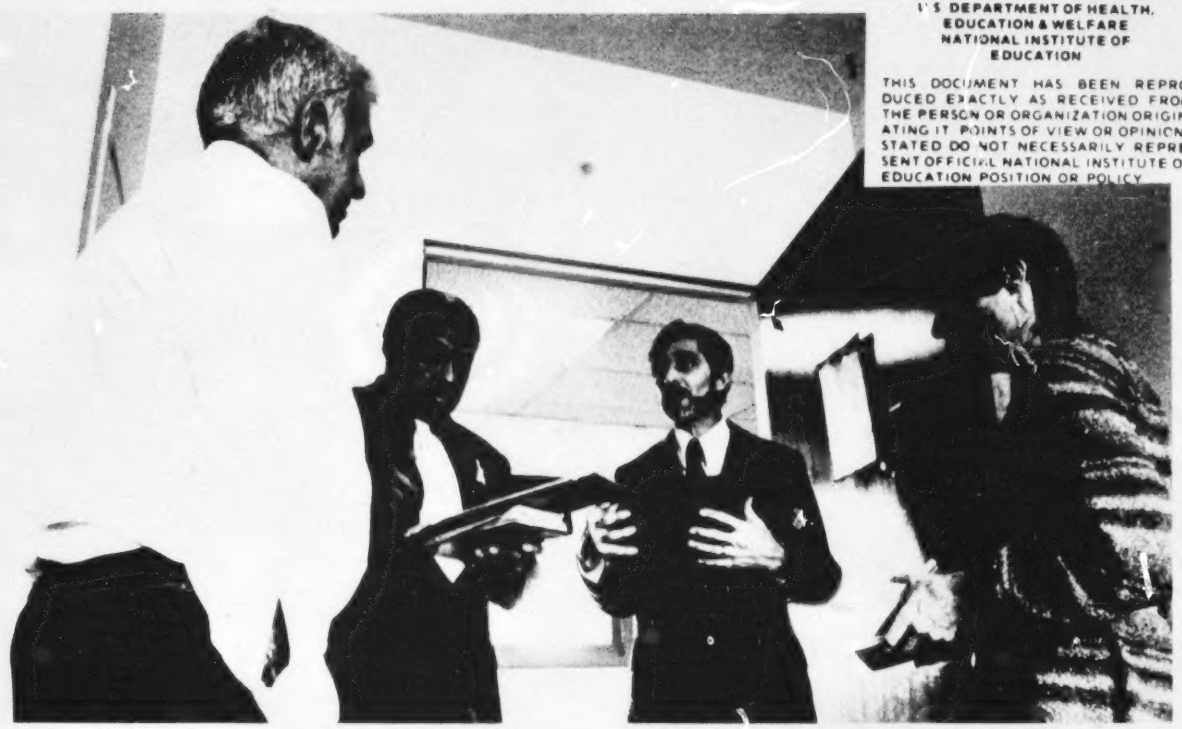

The Ohio Parole Officer Aide Program

Office of Technology Transfer
National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice
Law Enforcement Assistance Administration
U.S. Department of Justice

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Gerald M. Caplan, *Director*

LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE ADMINISTRATION

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An Exemplary Project

ONLY EX-OFFENDERS NEED APPLY

The Ohio Parole Officer Aide Program

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FOREWORD

The National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals urged correctional agencies to take "immediate and affirmative action to employ capable and qualified ex-offenders in correctional roles." The Parole Officer Aide Program of Ohio carries out the spirit of the recommendation and demonstrates its practical value.

The benefits are decidedly mutual. Ex-offenders are allowed to attain paid professional positions -- careers which they, their families and the communities can respect. The empathy and special perspective which the Aides bring to their work have added a positive new dimension to Ohio's parole services.

This brochure provides a general description of the Ohio project. A detailed operations manual is now in preparation; publication will be announced through the National Criminal Justice Reference Service.

Gerald M. Caplan
Director
National Institute of Law Enforcement
and Criminal Justice

April 1976

THE CONCEPT: MAKING USE OF UNIQUELY QUALIFIED PEOPLE

Marty sat in the restaurant booth and watched Sam work expertly at the grill. Marty was glad he had found him the job. But today something about Sam's moves was different, careless. Marty wondered.

"What is it, Sam?" They faced each other in the booth over lunch.

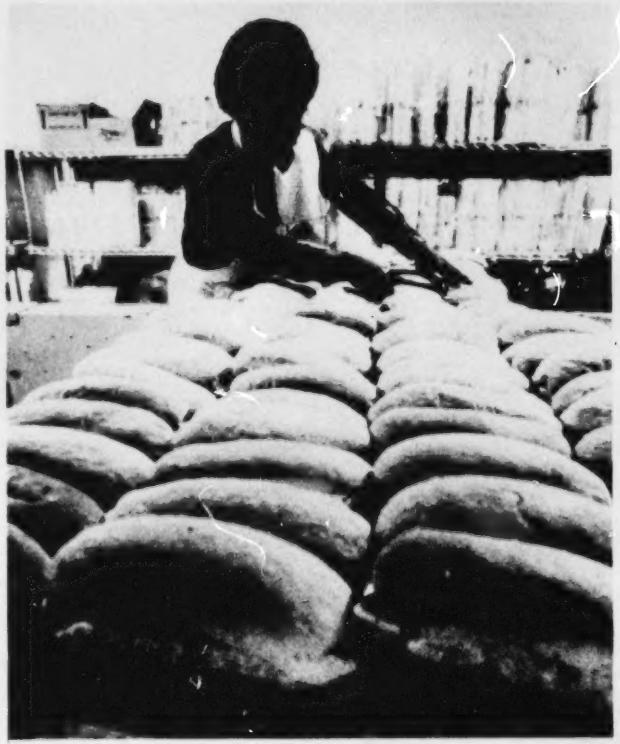
"Nothing, man. I got no appetite today."

"You, no appetite?"

"I don't put you on. Never."

And Sam went back to work behind the counter, a desolate look on his face.

Marty had seen the look before. He had seen it on others and he had seen it on himself. Marty wondered. And early the next day he was still wondering as he rapped hard on the door of Sam's trailer.



"What's this – a hospital?" Marty asked as Loretta, Sam's wife, let him in.

Over in the far corner, in the shadows, was Sam's biggest boy, Walter. Walter had a blanket around his shoulders and he shook.

Suddenly Sam was in front of Walter, blocking Marty's view. "Walter's got the flu. You'll catch it."

But Marty had seen enough to know everything, and he no longer wondered why Sam looked desolate in the restaurant.

"Sam, I know that flu like the back of my hand. The Cold Turkey flu."

And later that morning Walter was in a drug center, getting more help than a blanket for the Cold Turkey flu.

Marty's Job

"Marty" is a fictional Parole Officer Aide (POA) in Ohio. He's an ex-offender and ex-parolee. In the

Ohio Adult Parole Authority (APA), Marty symbolizes a new breed – a parole officer with the inside street savvy only an ex-offender can have.

While Marty's achievement was helping an ex-offender's son, Ohio's achievement was creating the parole aide job for Marty. Not just a job, either – an important job.

THE DIFFERENCE: Putting Weight Behind the Job

What's the difference between an Ohio Parole Officer and a Parole Officer Aide?

To begin with, one is an ex-offender and one isn't. But both are professionals in their relationships with parolees. The Parole Authority has given the POA far greater responsibility than the typical ex-offender para-professional. The job, in other words, has clout.

How it Works

After careful selection and training, the ex-offender aide is directly supervised by the Senior Parole Officer. The POA trains on-the-job for about six months, then assumes duties which in substance are identical to those of parole officers. He supervises cases, develops job resources, speaks at schools and before pre-release inmate groups, and uses his special background and perspective to help meet real needs in his territory. Although the POA cannot sign parole violation reports, he can prepare them for a parole officer's signature.

Extra Responsibility: Multiple Problems

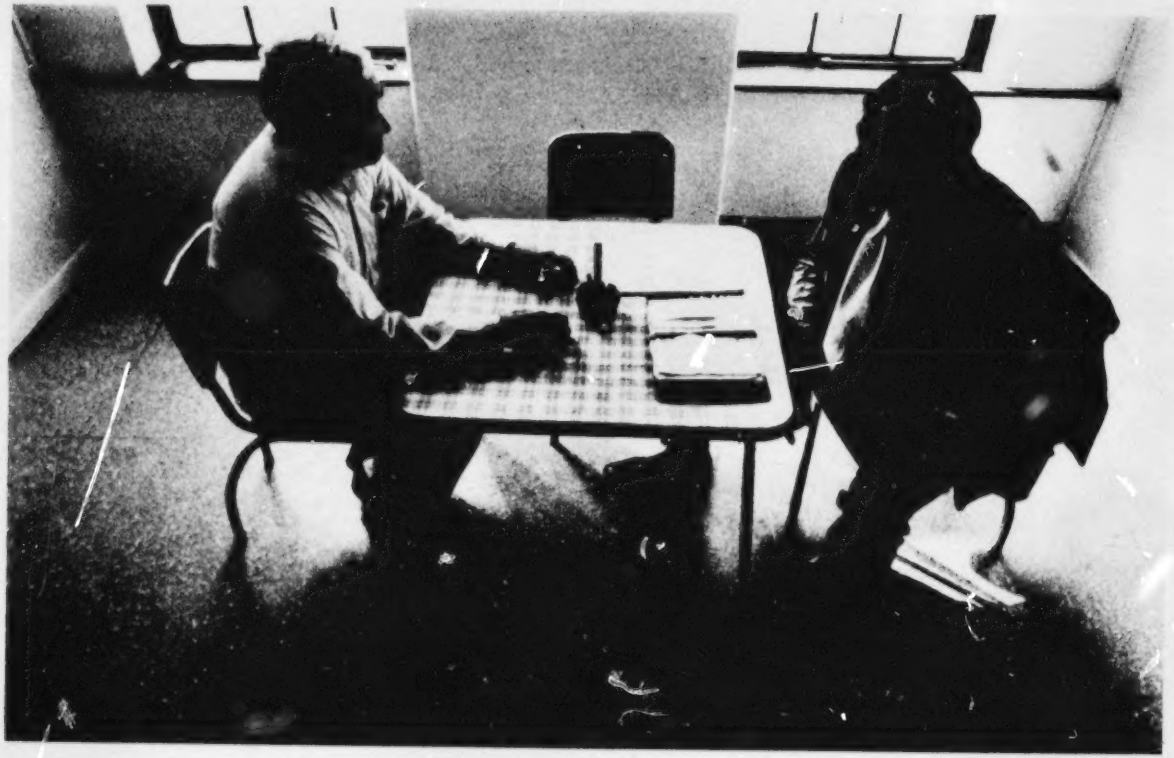
The APA has found that the ex-offender aides can effectively handle multiple problem cases needing intensive supervision. This had become a POA "specialty." A multiple problem parolee isn't necessarily one who has committed an especially severe crime. But the person does have a combination of social and/or behavioral problems which might impede successful completion of parole. Such cases are extremely time-

consuming for the already burdened parole officer. But the POA's background, empathy, and familiarity with the neighborhood and street make him uniquely able to cope with the multiple problem situation.

Status and Upward Mobility

The APA has affirmed its faith in the program by converting the POA from a state contract position to permanent civil service status. Moreover, POAs can move up to full parole officer positions through a three-step career ladder developed by the APA. The Parole Authority also authorizes 10 hours of paid educational leave weekly for POAs.

In short, POAs are serious about their careers, because the state has made their careers serious.



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THE CONTRIBUTION: Strengthening Credibility, Communications, Overall Effectiveness

Who benefits from the Ohio POA program besides the ex-offender chosen for the job?

At least three parties benefit. The state. The regular parole officers. The parolees under POA supervision.

How the State Benefits

Obviously, a state that hires ex-offenders for meaningful jobs is in an excellent position to ask that private industry do the same. Private industry cannot accuse Ohio of failing to practice what it preaches.

How Parole Officers Benefit

When the POA goes back to the office, he brings many of his parole officer colleagues a perspective they never quite had. The POA sees the street through eyes that have hustled the street, cased the street, and conned the street. The POA is said to excel at assessing needs of clients, and it's no wonder. He's been there himself. POAs are said to be tougher on parolees because of their own days of conning the parole officer.

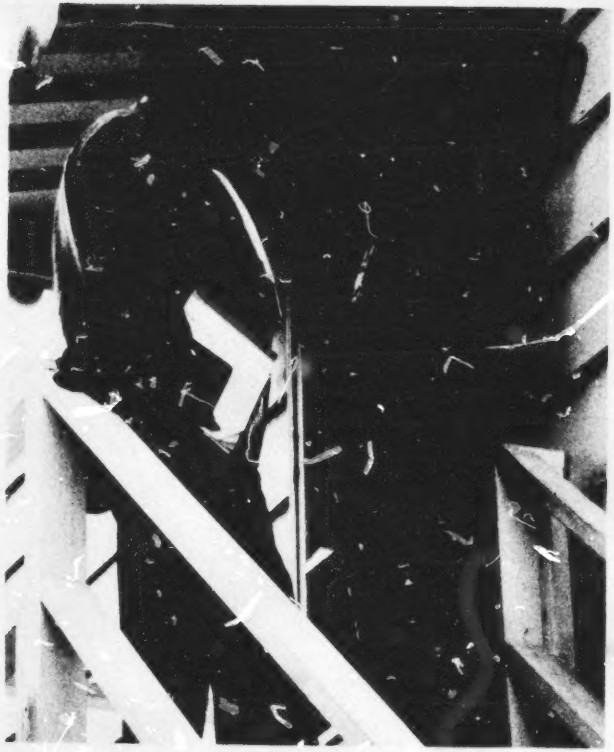
A good POA network, then, becomes the source of a more realistic, productive perspective for the entire parole unit. It opens up new channels that work from the inside out.

How Parolees Benefit

This feedback works two ways. Not only does the parole agency get a better slant on the street. But ex-offenders themselves through the person of the POA, get a fresh view of the Parole Authority – a view that shakes up stereotypes.

When you're well aware your parole officer used to be behind bars, it's a lot harder to say Ohio doesn't help ex-offenders go straight. Actions speak louder than words, and parolees under POA supervision have living proof that their state takes action.

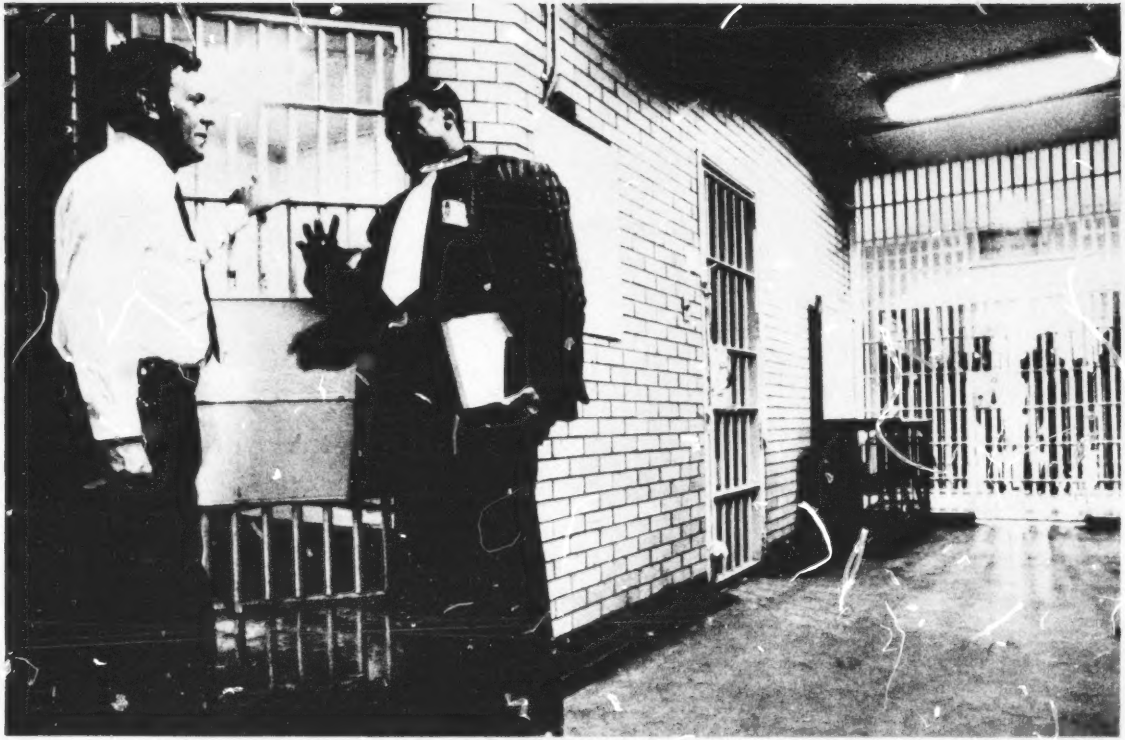
The POAs themselves feel their greatest contribution is helping people with prison records find jobs. If



anyone knows how to conquer that stigma, it's an Ohio POA.

Recidivism

But do the POAs help ex-offenders stay out of jail? Although incomplete, the findings are encouraging. During fiscal 1974, POAs were involved with 433 case terminations, including 68 parole violations, while POs had 9,294 terminations with 1,079 violations. Although true comparisons cannot be made because of the differences in caseload size and composition, the evidence suggests that parolees under POA supervision present no greater risk to the community than their counterparts on regular PO caseloads. And what about the POAs themselves? Do they backslide? According to the Ohio Adult Parole Authority, POAs have proven to be no more of an employment risk than regularly recruited parole officers. The key issue, of course, is overall quality of service. And the APA feels that, if anything, their POAs have improved the quality of the services available to the parolees.



THE KEY FACTORS: Why This Program Works

Ohio has a reputation for promoting ex-offender employment and fostering productive contact among ex-offenders. The level of commitment to the POA program is high, an important ingredient for success in an experimental approach such as the ex-offender aide concept.

The Market

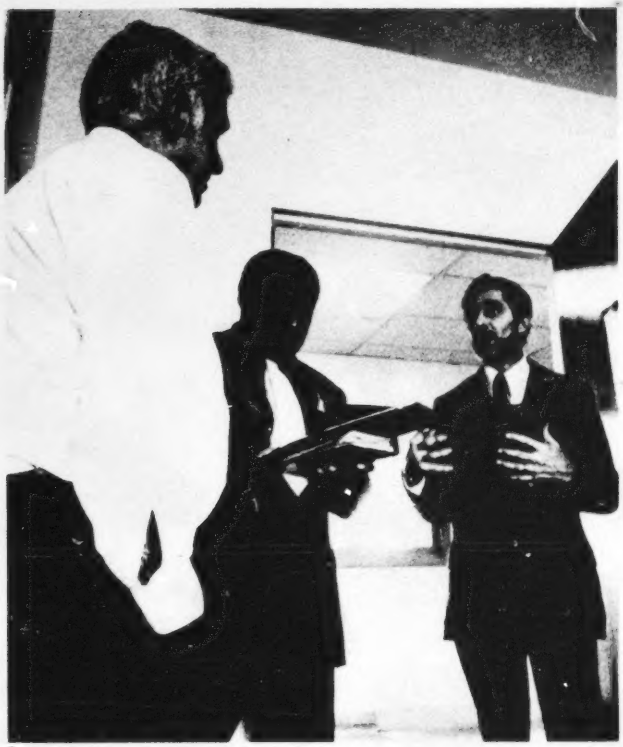
Based on the Ohio experience, any state would have assured market of qualified applicants. APA projections indicate that 3,200 individuals successfully complete parole each year. And they estimate that about 5 percent of former parolees qualify to be POAs. That's a potential of 160 new candidates annually from which APA can pick the best.

Screening and Training

Screening is strict and sensible. The APA wants no part of POAs who were known as "snitches" when they were on the inside, because the POA must command ex-offender respect. POAs undergo the same training as POs. They now receive a 40-hour course conducted by the Ohio Correctional Academy. And for a full six months, they train on-the-job with a Senior Parole Officer. The POAs agree this contact with the Senior PO is the most valuable part of their preparation.

Cultivating PO Support

Ohio Parole Officers support the goals of the POA program. And a crucial reason they do is that the program emphasizes PO participation at key stages in an Aide's career. A person becomes a POA candidate through the recommendation of his former Parole Officer. So the PO has a personal stake in his former client's success. Through on-the-job training, a PO-POA teamwork relationship is created which grows stronger as the candidate matures. Contrary to what you might expect, the POAs don't see themselves as advocates within their Units for parolees. That's because they — and the rest of the Unit — see the POA function as integral *to* the Unit. The POA isn't viewed as merely a para-professional on the fringe.



THE CHALLENGE: Will it Work for You?

Using the Ohio experience as a model, can other states develop POA programs in which ex-offenders are assigned major parole responsibilities?

There are strong indications the program will indeed work elsewhere. Let's look at some specific questions you may be asking.

Q. How would the program affect my normal process of selecting parole officers?

A. Like Ohio most states would be able to establish a separate career ladder for the POA without upsetting the established PO selection system. The POA should have a career ladder which feeds into the normal parole officer selection process.

Q. How am I certain to select the best (low-risk) POAs?

A. Ohio shies away from persons younger than 22; insists that applicants successfully complete parole and be employed for six months after the completion date. Applicants can't have assaultive crime records and must be free of

psycho-pathological tendencies. And they must pass a credit check.

Q. Suppose my POs are unionized?

A. Initially, the union could be a barrier. But the existence of a union means the program could be bargained for. Once the bargain is struck, the union system will formalize the program more quickly.

Q. How much does the project cost?

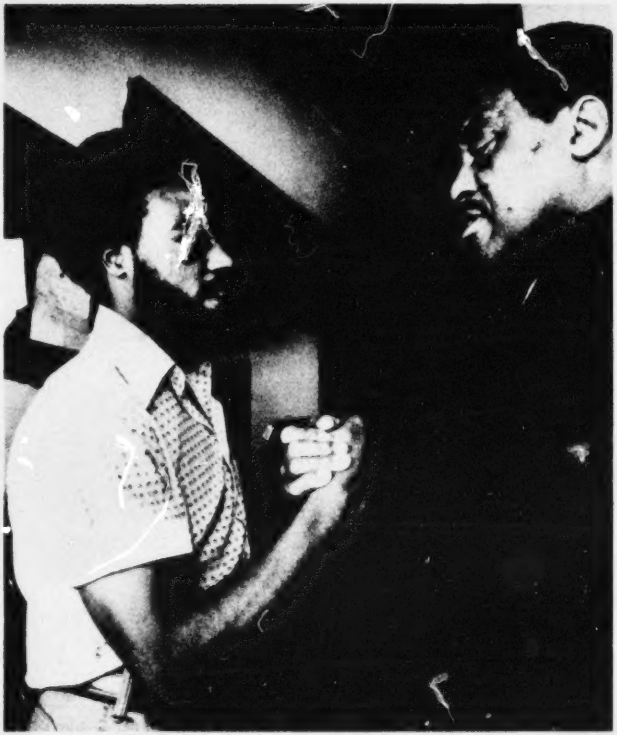
A. In Fiscal 1974, the Ohio POA program was supported by an LEAA grant of $329,913. The budget provided for 24 POAs (salary and benefits), consultant services, travel and supplies.

Q. How does the POA program affect case assignment?

A. Cases can be assigned in the normal manner to POs and POAs alike. Naturally, unrealistically difficult cases shouldn't go to a POA until he's had solid case experience.

Q. What about affirmative action statutory or executive mandates?

A. They make it easier to hire and promote minority and female POA candidates.



Q. How accessible is information on the Ohio program?

A. The procedures are well documented, and the Ohio Adult Parole Authority welcomes inquiries.

The Moral Challenge

The concept of employing ex-offenders in parole services is not unique to Ohio. In 1974, ex-offenders worked in the parole systems of 16 states. This experience with the concept certainly indicates that the Ohio effort could be copied on a broad scale.

The slogan of the APA might well be, "No lip service spoken here." In giving decent jobs to ex-offenders, Ohio has achieved a breakthrough in attitudes. In spirit and substance, its program meets the standards of the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals:

> "Correctional agencies should take immediate and affirmative action to employ capable and qualified ex-offenders in correctional roles."

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